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The Gleaners



Clara E. Laughlin

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The Gleaners

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Levelette

By

CLARA E. LAUGHLIN

Author of "Everybody's Darling," "Evolution of a Girl," "The Lady in Gray," "The Girl of the Year," etc.

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The Gleaners

A Novelette

By
Clara E. Laughlin

Author of "Everybody's Lonesome," "Evolution of a Girl's Ideal," "The Lady in Gray," "Divided," etc.

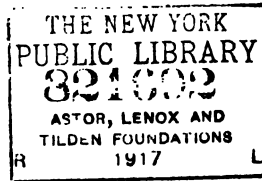
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The Gleaners

I

HER OWN WAY

THE autumn afternoon sunshine was pouring its gold through the west windows of the sitting-room before Julietta found her first opportunity to sit down. But she was not able to rest, even then ; her tired body had not relaxed, and her searching eyes were making eager inventory in quest of something left undone.

The rubber-tree ! Some careless person in passing through the room had brushed against the plant and knocked off a leaf. This had happened since morning, when Julietta tidied up.

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As if her tense muscles were wire springs, she bounced out of her rocking-chair and went to appraise the damage.

"One would think that in a room as large as this most anybody could get through without breaking things, if they were of a mind to take a little care!"

But that was just it! Care they *wouldn't* take. Julietta's mind framed several accusations, and tried each in turn. The weight of probability lay heaviest on her father. He always seemed to have to struggle more in getting into an overcoat than any other man alive. And instead of staying in the hall to accomplish this clumsy process, he almost invariably returned to the sitting-room, one arm in his coat and the other waving wildly about in search of its armhole, while he delivered some all-but-forgotten message or asked the rep-

Her Own Way

etition of some only-half-remembered mandate.

Julietta could recall, now, when that leaf must have been sacrificed. At the dinner table she had asked her father to stop in at the jeweller's as he came home, and bring the dining-room clock that had been repaired. And of course, when that struggle with his overcoat was at its wildest, he had come back, clear to the dining-room door, and asked her what it was that she wanted him to bring.

Julietta bent resentfully and picked up the fallen leaf. This was the second to be sacrificed within a fortnight. There were only eleven leaves left. Her father and brothers made fun of her "sprouting walking-stick," as they called her poor, sparse rubber-tree. It was nothing to them whether she had leaves on her plant or had not. What they cared about was

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their own perfect ease : their comfortable beds, their three hot meals a day, their clothes kept in perfect repair, their unchallenged right to fill the house with pipe-smoke. The rubber-plant was one of her few, one of her very few, indulgences. But they had no respect for it. It never seemed to occur to them that she could desire any happiness in life beyond the happiness of ministering to them.

They pretended that they didn't know why she couldn't keep a servant. Julietta knew! They were always averring their willingness to pay a servant any wages in reason. As if wages could hire any woman to work as Julietta worked! Yet they were not appreciative. When they came home, night after night, and found her "worn to a frazzle," they were not sympathetic. They said : "Why do

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you do it?" And they reiterated their belief that if Julietta could not get for five dollars a week a servant to her liking, then in their opinion it would be well to pay ten.

"And she'd eat and waste ten more. A thousand dollars a year for a hired girl who would never do one thing really right! I'd rather have the thousand, if you please."

They tried to explain to her that what they wanted to pay the thousand for was her freedom from fret. But Julietta said she should fret herself to death if she knew that so much money was being paid out "for next to nothing." So they gave it up, and let Julietta have what they were pleased to call her own way.

Her own way, indeed! Julietta wondered if ever in her life she had had it. Their mother died when Julietta was

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seventeen ; died after a long illness during which she spent hours out of every day telling Julietta what to do for her father and the boys. It was the talk of the village how faithful to her charge Julietta had been. Everybody, Julietta reflected, seemed more conscious of her devotion than the three men who were its beneficiaries.

Their village was a suburb of a big city. It was a very big village, now, and supported a good many thriving businesses. Many of the residents were wealthy, and nearly all of them were well-to-do. Julietta's father was in the real estate business : he handled a good deal of neighbouring property on commission ; he bought and sold a little of it for himself, on speculation ; and he loaned money on improved property and money wherewith to build. One of his sons was

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in business with him ; the other was owner of the village drug store. The people whose entire orbit was within the village formed social circles more or less completely apart from the circles of those who were commuters. This incensed Julietta. There was a rich commuter who was in the real estate business in the city. He sold more expensive property than her father sold, and negotiated larger loans. But the difference was one only of degree. Yet that man's womenfolk disregarded Julietta in much the same way that they disregarded the depot hackman's daughter. They made life difficult for her in other ways, too. They and others of their kind had worked havoc with the cost of living. They outbid the villagers in the matter of eggs and chickens and other food products of the country round about ; they absorbed at more than city

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wages all the available "help"; and in a hundred other ways they complicated the problem of domestic management in the village without doing anything appreciable to add to the enjoyability of life. Or at least so Julietta thought. Her father and brothers were satisfied. For, if they had to pay more for chickens, they were also able to charge more for shore property and for the filling of prescriptions. But there, again, was the selfish "man of it"! They seemed to think that if they paid the bills and gave Julietta ten dollars a week for herself, she ought to be satisfied. Ten dollars a week for her very life-blood! And what good to her, anyway, was even the ten dollars? She couldn't go into town to a concert or a matinée once in a blue moon, because meal times came so close together. And when you're never more than an hour or

Her Own Way

so at a time out of the kitchen, you don't need many nice clothes.

Julietta's revolt against the tyranny of her estate was continual. It was practically unremitting in her mind, and it was seldom absent from her expression. Her manner was one of protestation; her speech was sharp and hurried and gave one to understand that she did not allow herself leisure to loiter, and that she had no time to humour the leisurely propensities of others.

People were careful how they intruded upon Julietta; so careful that she was often embittered to see how little they cared whether her scant leisure was enlivened or not.

II

THE COMING OF THE PICTURE

THE door-bell rang. Julietta laid down the rubber-plant leaf and went to the door. A man with an express package was there. He said the package was for Julietta ; and presented his book for her to sign.

When he was gone, Julietta carried the box into the house and through to the kitchen. She was so pleasurably excited that she forgot to remind the expressman that he should have come to the back door.

The sender's address on the box told her that it was from her cousin in the city. Julietta wondered what had "come over" her cousin, all of a sudden. The cousin was not given to making un-

The Coming of the Picture

expected gifts. The shape of this box indicated a picture. A chisel soon solved the mystery. It *was* a picture! Julietta looked at it resentfully; her disappointment was keen, but she was suffering something more than mere disappointment. Her cousin had never selected that picture with a view to giving Julietta pleasure—never! Julietta's lips tightened. The picture was a cast-off, and had been shipped to her to get rid of it. Her first impulse was to nail on again the boards she had pried off, and return the box with a chill note saying she was sure a mistake had been made. Then she caught sight of a letter. It said:

“DEAR JULIETTA:

“In our club we had an art lecture last month. It was about a French painter, Millet, and was very interesting. One of his best pictures is called *The Gleaners*. He only got \$400 for it. But

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the last time it was sold it was bought for the French government for \$60,000. I don't quite see why it's so great, but it seems it is. I bought this fine copy of it for our sitting-room—it's all in browns, you know—but Geoffrey won't have it. He says it gives him the backache. So I thought I'd send it to you. Maybe you won't like it either. If you don't, just keep it to give for a wedding present. I would have, only so many of my friends have seen it in my house.

"I hope you're well. You must come and see us soon.

"With love from Geoffrey and me to all of you,

"Ever your affectionate cousin,

"ALVA."

Julietta did not like Geoffrey. He had money, and he was patronizing. Undoubtedly he had told Alva to ship the offending picture out to Julietta; he considered that one in her position ought to be grateful for any favour. Julietta was not grateful. Geoffrey need not suppose

The Coming of the Picture

that because she worked so hard she had no spirit. She would show him a thing or two !

She shoved the box with the offending picture under the kitchen table, and went into the sitting-room to write a note.

But just then the washerwoman's children came for the bundle of soiled clothes. Their "wagon" was the much-battered wicker baby carriage which had seen hard service before it descended to their humble ownership ; and it had been crib and conveyance for six babies since, besides doing innumerable duties in the way of bringing home free kindling and expensive pails of coal, and carrying to their destination piles of spick-and-span clothes.

Julietta left the children in the back entry while she went to get the laundry bag.

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"You tell your mother," she charged the little girl when giving her the bag, "that I find it very expensive, paying by the dozen. It counts up to more than having a woman by the day."

"My ma can't go out by the day very well. There's no one to get dinner for us or to mind the baby," the little girl replied.

"I don't want her to come here—it makes too much mess and bother. But you tell her that I've figured it all out—soap and starch and blueing and fire for ironing, and all—and I say she's charging too much!"

"She's cheaper than the laundry!" the little girl defended.

"She has to be, or she wouldn't get any work," Julietta reminded.

"And her work is better! She don't put nothin' in the clo'es to rot 'em," the boy declared.

The Coming of the Picture

Julietta looked sternly at these forward children.

“You tell your mother I want her to come around and see me the first time she gets a chance,” she said—and closed the kitchen door.

When she went back to her note, the mood for it was gone ; her irritation with Geoffrey had given place to her irritation with Mrs. Mears.

She was sorry about the note ; sundry scathing phrases she had been all ready to set down when those Mears children came had quite escaped her.

In the hope of remembering what they were, she went back to the kitchen, dragged the box out from under the table, and looked again at the offending picture, read again the offensive letter.

The picture was beautifully framed in a brown wood the exact tone of the photo-

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graph itself. The frame was severely plain, but the grain of the walnut was exquisite, and its satin finish gave it what Julietta called "an air." She had often admired the Braun Clement prints she saw in picture shop windows and on the walls of some of her most tasteful friends ; she knew that one of these fine French photographs of a celebrated picture was considered more elegant than a mediocre "original" in a gilt frame ; she had even gone so far as to think she would buy one, some day—not for this home which she could never hope to have to her liking ; but if ever she had the joy of furnishing one to her own taste. (The possible man who might live in Julietta's house was an absolutely tractable man who would intrude no dreams of his own long-cherishing into her scheme of things. He had nothing in common with the three

The Coming of the Picture

men Julietta knew best of all ; nothing in common with a man like Geoffrey who could venture to order a picture out of his house because he said it made his back ache.)

Julietta looked admiringly at that French walnut frame. In her mind's eye she could see it with the bent gleaners removed and a "Girl With the Muff" in their place.

She decided not to return the picture. But in order to keep it and her self-respect, she must think up something to say to Alva which would make Alva feel like a fool for having given it away. This idea interested Julietta more than the other had done. She took the picture out of its packing, and carried it into the sitting-room.

Sixty thousand dollars ! Julietta wished she knew something about why so vast a

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sum should have been paid for this unattractive picture of three peasant women in a stubbly field. Such coarse, clod-like women, too! She studied them intently, but unavailingly except that they made the muscles of her back ache, too.

Julietta had always heard the French characterized as light, pleasure-loving, worshipful of beauty. Why was this picture so precious to them?

III

THE WORTH OF THE PICTURE

FATHER and Frank and Steve viewed the picture with interest, in the light of Alva's letter, but without being able to hazard even a good guess as to why it was so highly regarded.

"You can't tell anything from a photograph," Frank reminded. "In the original the colours may be gorgeous—or something like that."

Father was concerned with the rise in value.

"From four hundred dollars to sixty thousand is some rise," he said. "I wonder how long it took to make the jump."

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Julietta knew, vaguely, that Millet was not a great while dead ; she thought the jump in value must have been within a few years.

“I’ve seen it happen, over and over again,” father went on ; “a man gets a-hold of a piece of property that ought by all the signs to be a good investment. And he holds it for years, paying taxes, and sells it for about what it cost him. Two years later, or so, the fellow that bought it trebles his money !”

Steve went back to his drug store as soon as he had eaten his supper ; but the other three sat around and looked at the picture, and studied it as if it were some peculiarly fascinating puzzle. And talk of one thing led to talk of another in a more animated discussion than had enlivened this household for many months before. It was ten o’clock, and Steve

The Worth of the Picture

was back again, before anybody realized that the evening had flown.

Steve's store was the grand clearing-house for village information. Everybody in the suburb went there with more or less frequency. A notice posted in the drug store was the favourite method of communication with the public. People might or might not read the Lost and Found or the Help Wanted or the House to Rent columns of the city dailies, and they might but probably would not read the Shore Suburban News ; but they were sure to read a notice that was posted in the drug store.

Steve had, of course, a speaking acquaintance with every one in the village ; and he had a fund of knowledge about most every one far beyond what it would have been comfortable for them to realize. He knew a great many things about peo-

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ple in the village, but last of all kinds of information to percolate to the drug store was any information about the villagers' artistic tastes. So Steve wrote a notice :

“WANTED TO KNOW—Something about the French artist Millet, and especially about his picture called ‘*The Gleaners*.’ Any one who happens to know will confer a favour by speaking to the Proprietor.”

From a little after seven, when the notice was posted up near the cigar case and the candy counter in the front of the store, till past nine, it was read many times, but without other result than that some who felt on pretty free terms with “the Proprietor” ventured to “kid” him about his new interest in art.

“Got a girl, Steve?” they teased. “Does she make you answer questions about What’s-his-name?”

Steve reiterated that he was seeking

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the information for some one else. Some of the village wags believed him, and some didn't.

About nine-thirty an interurban trolley car stopped at the drug store door (one of the offices of the drug store was as a trolley waiting-room) and a man got off. He stepped to the cigar case to make a purchase, and the notice caught his eye.

Steve had waited on him. He knew as little about this man as about anybody in the village. Practically the sum of his knowledge was that the gentleman's name was Sheppard ; that he had come to the suburb, about two months ago, from nobody-knew-where ; and that he was living in the little stone house of the Hansons' out beyond the ravine. The Hansons had gone abroad in the spring ; their house was rented for the summer by a Southern family, and in September, im-

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mediately after the Southerners left, this Mr. Sheppard came. He had a Japanese servant who was housekeeper and valet, but who fraternized not at all with the other servants of the village nor with the tradespeople ; so not much was known of Mr. Sheppard who escaped being considered "mysterious" only because his manner was so frank and so apparently free that hardly any one realized how little about himself he ever revealed.

"Interested in art, Mr. Grier?" he asked, when he had finished reading the notice.

Steve smiled. "I guess you'd hardly call it that," he said ; "but I'd like to know a little about that particular picture and why it cost sixty thousand dollars."

"Did it?" Mr. Sheppard asked. "I didn't know. I've seen it."

"The real one?"

"Yes; in the Louvre."

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“Is it very wonderful?”

“It is—why, to tell you the truth I don’t know much more about it than you do, except that I can remember just how it looks. The yellow stubble, the bent figures, the sunburnt hands and faces of the women, the blistering heat of the sun which the picture makes one feel as if he were out under it, all come back to me very vividly, now that you remind me of the painting. But I don’t believe I know much more about it than that it is considered a great canvas. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, though! Mr. Hanson’s library is a very good one, I’m finding. He is an appreciator of art. I’ll look the books over, when I go home ; and if there’s anything about Millet I’ll bring it down to you in the morning.”

“I wonder who he is and what he

The Gleaners

does," Frank said, when Steve had recounted his talk with Mr. Sheppard.

Steve admitted his inability to guess. "He seems to be an awfully nice, *human* sort of a chap—nothing queer or freakish about him. I guess it's no sign that because a man doesn't tell all his business to a bunch of gossips like there are in this village there's anything the matter with him. Looks to me like a good proof of his intelligence."

Julietta was beginning to be quite excited. She had forgotten all about the rubber-plant when she lay down to sleep that night, and all about the excessive charges of Mrs. Mears. She could hardly wait for the morrow and what developments it might bring.

When Steve came home for dinner the next day he brought a book, and a message.

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"Mr. Sheppard found a book that tells about the picture," he announced, handing the book to Julietta; "and he said he had sat up nearly all night reading it. I told him how we came to be so interested. And he said that he certainly was obliged to Alva for sending us the picture."

"*He* was obliged?" echoed Julietta. "I wonder why!"

"Maybe he'll tell you when you take back the book," Steve ventured.

IV

THE MEANING OF THE PICTURE

AS soon as she had hurried the dinner dishes out of the way, Julietta sat down to make acquaintance with that book which the mysterious Mr. Sheppard had stayed awake nearly all night to read. It was the "Life and Letters of Jean François Millet," and the narrative gripped her almost on the first page. Withdrawn into a world far apart from her own, she was as if veritably in Gruchy on the rugged Norman coast ; in the little gray stone house with its thatched roof, where the peasant-painter was born and where his boyhood was lived ; in the remarkable family group of that simple, God-fearing home where the will of the Almighty was

The Meaning of the Picture

the hourly thought of every one, and the routine of life was so close to that of patriarchal days in Palestine that the Bible seemed like a personal revelation to them.

She toiled in the fields with the boy François while the seasons unfolded their wonders to him and he felt himself, as he plowed and sowed and reaped, one with those Bible men who were his chief companions-invisible. She followed him through the struggles and starvation of his student life, up to that time in his thirty-fourth year when he was beginning to be known for the brilliant colouring and marvellous flesh-tints of his pictures, and the French government gave him an order for a painting. The subject he chose was "Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert," and Millet lavished all his skill on Hagar's form, intending it to be a

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striking study of the nude. But one evening when the picture was almost finished, he happened to overhear himself discussed by two youths as "a man named Millet who never paints anything but naked women." Then Millet was overcome with shame of himself and of his departure from the beautiful old ideals of his boyhood. He went home and said to his devoted young wife: "If you consent, I will paint no more of those pictures. Life will be harder than ever, and you will suffer; but I shall be free, and able to do what I have long dreamt of." To which the brave girl—she was only twenty-two and had two babies—replied: "I am ready. Do as you will."

From that moment Millet's back was turned forever on success as the world offered it to him if he would gratify its tastes. He took his little family to

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Barbizon on the edge of the forest of Fontainebleau, on one hand, and of the great plain of La Biere on the other. There life was indeed hard, and sorrows were many ; but there Millet was free to do what he had " long dreamt of " ; and there, far exceeding his fondest dreams, he wrought not only immortal beauty but a new era in art.

Finally, Julietta came to *The Gleaners* ; to the letter to Rosseau in which Millet first mentioned it, saying :

" I am working like a slave to get my picture of *The Gleaners* done in time. I really do not know what will be the result of all the trouble that I have taken. There are days when I feel as if this unhappy picture had no meaning. If only it does not turn out too disgraceful ! . . . Headaches, big and little, have attacked me during the last month with such violence that I have scarcely been able to work for a quarter of an hour at a time."

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She read with what scoffing and abuse the noble picture was received ; and how Millet had replied to it : " They may do their worst ! I stand firm. They may call me a painter of ugliness, a detractor of my race, but let no one think they can force me to beautify peasant-types. I would rather say nothing than express myself feebly."

Thanks to the outcry of the visionless, he got only two thousand francs for his picture. Julietta wondered why the picture was considered so " dangerous " that many people had protested against its exhibition and declared that Millet was trying to stir up another Revolution.

She had to admit that she was not very sure just what " gleaners " really were. She had a hazy idea, of course, but it was very hazy. The only definite things with which she could connect any of her vague

The Meaning of the Picture

impressions about gleaners were sermons and Sunday-school lessons dealing with Ruth. Julietta thought she would look it up.

She got the Bible and reread the story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law. Julietta thought she knew it by heart, she had heard it so often reiterated; but this was the first time she had ever read it searchingly. Ruth was a gleaner; she left the land of her birth and went to Judea where, according to a provision of the Lord, a woman might earn her bread in the sweat of her brow and need not, as in Moab, beg the bitter bread of dependence. For in Israel the husbandman was commanded :

“ When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it : it shall be for the stranger, for the father-

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less, and for the widow : that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. . . . And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt : therefore I command thee to do this thing."

Julietta read it over several times ; then she looked intently at the picture which was beginning to mean so much to her. She got up and went and stood close to it that she might satisfy herself the better about some details. Her glance roved from the farmer's great stacks, in the background, to the few wisps each of the three gleaning women held in her hand ; she compared him, on horseback, like a general directing the movements of his men, with the bent women in the foreground, their eyes searching among the stubble for grains of wheat, their hands outstretched in eagerness to seize the

The Meaning of the Picture

tinest particle that might be transmitted into sustenance. Julietta had learned that the painter believed in the sweetness of that bread only which has been earned in toil ; she knew this picture could not be, as some had ignorantly interpreted it, a protest against the grim necessity of labour. What then ? A plea for fields not too clean-picked ?

V

MAKING AN APPLICATION

THERE was a knock at the back door. Resentful of the interruption, Julietta went to the door. Mrs. Mears had herself brought back the clean clothes.

"The children told me you wanted to see me, Miss Grier," the woman began. "I'm awful sorry if there's any dissatisfaction. I'd hate to lose your washing."

There was something about Mrs. Mears that reminded Julietta of the women in the picture ; her toil-bent figure had not the sturdiness of theirs, but she carried with her (when you came to notice such things) the same air of eager searchingness—as if she, like they, could not afford to let the tiniest particle of sustenance

Making An Application

escape her gleaning. Also, Julietta suddenly found herself feeling like the farmer on horseback, with his great stacks about him.

"Come in," she urged; "and let us talk about it."

Mrs. Mears lifted the clean clothes out of the battered baby-buggy, and closed the kitchen door behind her. Julietta unpinned the white wrapping (part of an old sheet it was) and gave an admiring look at Mrs. Mears' handiwork.

"How beautifully you do them!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Mears looked the astonishment she felt. She had expected criticism as a prelude to bargaining or dismissal.

"I try very hard," she answered, simply. "It means so much to me to have my customers satisfied."

"Come into the sitting-room," said

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Julietta ; “there is an open fire there, and easier chairs.”

Mrs. Mears was not able to conceal the wonder she felt ; it declared itself in her face ; but she followed Julietta, and accepted the comfortable chair Julietta indicated.

“I mustn’t stop,” she murmured. “I’ve to get back and see about the children’s supper.”

“Are none of them old enough to help you ?”

“Well, Elsie is ; but of course she works. She’s sixteen ; she works by a factory.”

“A factory ?”

“Yes’m—Higgins’—at Waumbeck.”

“Has he a factory there now ?”

“Yes’m.”

“And does your little girl go back and forth every day ?”

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"Yes'm; it's a ten-cent fare on the interurban. But that's a lot cheaper than goin' into the city to work, or stayin' in there to board. And of course, if I was to move into town, rents 'd be higher and I maybe couldn't find no place where I could dry clothes. And over to Waumbeck there ain't nobody that gives their washin' out to be done. I've figured it all out, and I don't see no other way."

"What does Elsie get?"

"Three a week."

"Three dollars! And it costs her a dollar and twenty cents for car fare!"

"I know! But a dollar an' eighty cents helps me out more than you'd believe. That's more than I can earn in a couple o' days, almost—when I count out what it costs me for soap an' fire, an' starch, an' bluein'. I could earn more if I went out by the day. But what does

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that mean? It means leavin' my house go at sixes and sevens; an' my children run wild, without proper food or care. It'd mean that Elsie'd have to come home nights, from that long day at the fact'ry, and find the house all every-which-way, an' no supper cooked, what with me gettin' home as late as her. An' I don't want her to get discouraged, Miss Grier. It's awful important not to leave a young girl like her get discouraged with tryin' to do right."

Julietta was glad that there was only firelight in the room, and that the dusk had deepened almost to dark; for her eyes were brimming, and her mouth was tremulous.

"Mrs. Mears," she began, quite timidly, "I've been thinking—since I sent that message to you yesterday. I'm sorry I troubled you to come here after

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your hard day's work ; but for *my* sake, I'm glad you came. I know that you do better work than the laundry. I've always known it ! Why, only last week, a friend of mine sent her best new hand-embroidered shirt-waist to the laundry, and when it came home it literally dropped to pieces from the stuff they had used to bleach it. You ought to get *more* than the laundry gets. But for the present, at least, I hope you'll let me pay you just as much."

Mrs. Mears received this announcement with a burst of grateful tears.

"If you could know, Miss Grier, what this means to me !" she cried.

"I see," commented Julietta's father, looking up from his newspaper at the supper table that evening, "that our neighbour, Grant Higgins, is giving a

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hundred thousand dollars for a new Erring Women's Refuge."

"He can afford to, without missing it," declared Frank.

Julietta's eyes flashed fire. "His half-paid employees are giving it!" she cried. "And they *do* miss it!"

Father and the boys looked in astonishment at Julietta. They had never before known her so vehement about anything except her own grievances.

VI

“MADE OVER”

STEVE carried the Millet book back to his store and waited for Mr. Sheppard to come in, homeward bound. Julietta thought Steve should have taken the book to Mr. Sheppard's house. But Steve was afraid that would look as if he were trying to force acquaintance. He might have sent it by his errand boy ; but he didn't.

The truth was, Steve was hoping for a chance to talk with Mr. Sheppard ; to tell him how much Julietta had enjoyed the book ; and perhaps to hear a little more of why Mr. Sheppard had been so interested in it.

Steve had not read the book : he had

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little time for reading and it was all he could do to keep up with the daily papers, the *Druggist's News*, and a few magazines. He was far from being sure that he understood what Julietta tried to tell about the book. But there was one thing that was unmistakable! Julietta had got something out of the picture or the book, or both, that was clarifying life at home in much the same magic way that Steve sometimes clarified turgid and muddy liquids by dropping in a chemical which caused precipitation.

Mr. Sheppard seemed much interested when Steve told him how grateful for the loan of the book his sister was.

"Whatever it was that she wanted to find out about that picture, she seems to have got it, all right," Steve said.

"I'm glad to hear it," Mr. Sheppard declared. "If it helped her as much as

"Made Over"

it has helped me, it is a wonderful book for sure. Does your sister paint?"

The question almost startled Steve, who, naturally, thought first of cosmetics.

"No ; oh, no !" he said ; "she doesn't do anything like that."

Mr. Sheppard laughed. "You seem quite shocked at the idea," he observed. "But so many young ladies nowadays paint, or stamp leather, or hammer brass, or—or—do something, you know. It seems quite the thing."

"Julietta keeps house," Steve explained. "She has kept house since she was seventeen. I guess she never had time to learn much about art."

On hearing this, Mr. Sheppard felt more interested than before. He had been seeing the druggist's young lady sister in his mind's eye ; imagining her as one of the village types he had met

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on the stage oftener than anywhere else. He had been amusedly sure that she painted china or lamp-shades; that she belonged to a whist club; was her brother's best patron of soda-water; and was probably "boning" on Millet to write a paper for the Mary E. Wilkins' Literary Society.

Steve's manner, much more than what he said, indicated a far different type. Mr. Sheppard pursued his inquiry.

"She must have more artistic taste than you think," he suggested, "if she is interested in Millet."

"I don't know that she ever heard of Millet till this week," Steve replied, bluntly. "I know *I* didn't. But this picture came—it was a hand-down from my cousin, whose husband said it made his back ache—and Julietta wanted to find out why it was considered so won-

“Made Over”

derful. I don't believe I understand yet. But I know *one* thing! Whatever it was that Julietta found out, it has about made her over.”

“Made her over?”

“Yes! She was pretty tired of her job—keeping house for my father and my brother and me—and she was —— Well, she didn't have enough to interest her, I guess, and she was kind of—hard to live with. Whatever it was that she got out of that book, she's been quite different.”

“Isn't that interesting!” Mr. Sheppard exclaimed. “I wonder what it was.”

“Something about gleaners. I haven't heard a great deal. I'm at home so little. She'd be glad to tell you, I'm sure, if you would care to know.”

“I should, indeed! What shall I do about it?”

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Steve looked at his watch. It was two-thirty.

"This is a slack time," he said. "I'll walk up home with you, if you want to go, and introduce you to my sister."

"Would she like that better than if I introduced myself?"

"Why, I don't know. I'll tell you! I'll 'phone her that you're coming; that'll do just as well."

VII

“SYMBOLS”

THE autumn afternoon was glorious. Frost had turned the trees to scarlet and gold and bronze, but had not yet noticeably stripped them, although the ground was well carpeted with fallen leaves. The sunshine was warm, but the air had a tingle in it which made pulses leap as no merely soft warmth can ever do.

The village was famed for its hard maples. A magnificent avenue of them completely overarched the broad street on which the Griers lived, and they were aflame with splendour as Sheppard walked along beneath their arch.

Julietta opened the door for him and asked him in. He was conscious of a

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sense of regret the moment the front door was closed and he got a whiff of the stove-heated air of the sitting-room.

"I'll tell you," he began when the first formalities were over with; "I want to talk with you. I—I'd be so glad if you would tell me some things about the book and what you got out of it. But—what have you got to do? Would it be impossible for you to come out and take a walk? I'm not very good at—this sort of thing."

He smiled, and Julietta understood. They were sitting stiffly facing each other, not very different from children in the first stage of a party.

"And 'anyway besides,' " he went on, "the afternoon is much too wonderful to miss."

Julietta was captivated by Mr. Sheppard's manner. It was shy, in a way;

“Symbols”

but it wasn't the kind of shyness that made another person ill at ease. And there was an unmistakable heartiness about it that seemed waiting only for a bit of friendly encouragement to bring it to full expression.

“I'd love to go,” she said; and went at once to get ready.

While she was gone he stood studying the picture, his memory painting it in the sun-drenched colours of the original.

Julietta smiled appreciatively when she came back and saw his intent scrutiny.

“When you've learned to read its meaning it is wonderful, isn't it?” she said.

“I don't know,” he answered, “that I've learned to read its meaning. But the fact that so many people have learned is what has meant so much to me!”

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"Yes?" she murmured, uncomprehendingly.

"Sounds mysterious-like, doesn't it?" he went on. "Perhaps I'd better try to explain. You see, the part that made such a hit with me was the part that told how discouraged Millet was when he was painting this picture. Remember? He said something about 'if only it does not turn out too disgraceful!' Think of that! He could feel that way about a canvas which was destined to be of such great worth to the world. If he could get that discouraged about one of the very greatest pictures of modern times, I figured that it isn't any wonder if a little fellow like me gets the blue devils about his job."

They were out in the maple-arched street now, and freedom of tongue seemed to come to Sheppard with the

"Symbols"

freer movements of his limbs. He had, too, made a pleasant discovery about Julietta.

"You walk with a good rhythm," he declared.

"Do I?" she asked. "I didn't know it."

"Look!" he illustrated comically, adjusting his speech to different lengths of steps differently accented. Julietta laughed delightedly. "That's the reason so many people don't like to walk," he went on. "They don't know how. And they don't know what they miss. If there's something I can't think out sitting down, I get on my legs and start them in a good, swinging rhythm. I usually find that my mind falls into step."

"I'll try it," Julietta cried. "I get the blue devils too."

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"And feel sure the job you're working so hard on will never turn out right?"

"I should say I do!"

"Was that why you liked the book so much—and the picture?"

"Why, no! I don't believe I had thought of that as much as you have. But I'm so glad you told me. It will help me a lot."

"It has helped me; helped me to go on, I mean. But I'm not out of the woods yet; I can't even see the sun so I can tell for sure which direction I'm going in."

Julietta had once spent a summer with some friends who had a camp far up north close to the great forests.

"And isn't there any moss on the north side of trees?" she asked.

"I haven't been able to find any."

"And no one has blazed a trail?"

"Oh, of course! But the trails are

“Symbols”

not very fresh, and it takes a keen eye to pick out old blazings. That's why this book helped so. I know that the man who followed this trail got out—or at least his work did.”

“He himself is buried on the forest's edge,” said Julietta, who had read the book through.

Sheppard looked at her appreciatively. “You love symbols,” he averred.

“Do I?” she questioned. “You are teaching me so many things about myself.”

VIII

“MOLTA SIMPATICA”

THEIR way, which they had not chosen but were following unthinkingly, led across the deep ravine and past the little stone house of the Hansons.

He ran ahead, as they approached the house, and left the book at the door.

“I hate impedimenta,” he admitted when he rejoined her in the road ; “ even when I am as much indebted to it as I am to that book.”

“ Do you paint ? ” she asked, suddenly. The sight of the stone house and of the Japanese who opened the door had brought back to her all the mystery about Mr. Sheppard.

“Molta Simpatica”

“No,” he answered; “but I’d like to. That’s why I’m here.”

She looked puzzled. “Let me explain,” he went on. “I’m not aspiring to paint people as Millet painted them—not with pigments. I want to write plays—real plays about real people. I’ve written light operas; I’ve made a good deal of money; most people think I ought to be satisfied to go on as I’ve begun. I can’t. I’m sick of being a clown. They tell me I ought to be glad I can make the world laugh. It isn’t laughing that I make them do; it’s grinning. They say I ought to be glad I can make people *forget*. I don’t want to make them forget! I want to make them think and feel. I’m tired of being a mountebank who sweats like a hired rogue to distract men and women from their peril and their obligations.

“Millet got ashamed to paint nude

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women to pander to Parisian taste. I got ashamed to go on writing comic operas. His friends said he was crazy. My friends say I am crazy. He deserved infinitely greater credit than I do, because when he turned his back on what he was ashamed of, he had a young wife and two little babies, and he was penniless. I have no one depending on me, and I am not poor. But it hasn't been easy. That's why I came here—away from every one I know. I've got a play that I want to write. But it comes hard. I feel worse than Millet did when he was painting *The Gleaners*."

"But you're encouraged now!" Julietta cried, eagerly.

He shook his head. "I'm encouraged to keep on trying to get out of the wood," he said; "but I don't see yet how I'm going to do it."

“Molta Simpatica”

“I don’t believe I understand,” she murmured.

“It isn’t the purpose that I lack—now,” he explained ; “it’s the vision. I want to do my play, but there’s something that balks me; something that doesn’t ‘come.’”

“I wish I could help you,” she said.
“But I’m not clever.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” he replied.
“However, it isn’t half so likely to be cleverness that helps as sympathy—the right kind of sympathy.”

Julietta smiled wistfully. “I can see,” she said, “how sympathy might help to console you for failing to do what you want to do ; but I can’t see how it could help you to—to write a good play !”

He laughed.

“I don’t blame you for not quite seeing,” he explained. “But it’s this way : we Anglo-Saxons have a rather limited

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way of using the words *sympathy* and *sympathetic*, as if they had only one meaning and that was allied to pity or compassion. I've picked up a few foreign phrases, now and then in my stays abroad, and I particularly like one that the Italians use a great deal: they say of some one—well, if I were in Italy I should say of you that you are *molta simpatica*; meaning that you and I have many tastes and ideals and understandings in common;—as we'd say in our clumsier speech, that we 'get on together' very well. That's what I meant by the sympathy that helps."

"I see," she murmured. "Isn't it pretty? '*Molta simpatica!*' What a lovely thing to be!"

"Isn't it? And how wonderfully it does help! I've met any number of persons after whom, when they had left me, I

“Molta Simpatica”

could only look and *blink*—in a dazed kind of way—and say: ‘How clever!’ But I can’t seem to remember that any one of that sort ever gave me any real help. The people who do that are the ones who contrive, in some lovely way, to set us right with our best selves. I don’t seem to know just how to express it—but *you* know! You’ve met people whose effect on you was to make you dig down and bring up some splendid aspiration that you used to cherish and then had put by, thinking you could never reach anywhere near to it; and, somehow, these people make you believe you *can*; and you try again—and succeed! Now, nobody need tell *me* that the fairies are all dead, while miracles like that are still happening in this world!”

“No indeed!” cried Julietta, her eyes shining with new visions.

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"It is because I wanted to get that magic into my play that I was 'stuck,'" he went on. "I want my play to be like the—the person who is '*molta simpatica*': to give every one who sees it a feeling that he's finer than he thought he was, or than *any* body ever thought he was. . . . Perhaps then he'll try to do something to prove it!"

"You can do it!" Julietta declared, turning to him a radiant face whereon, already, "the magic" had begun to work its charm. "I never supposed there was any one in the world with such a lovely dream. And I cannot hope to make you understand what it has meant to me to—to know about it."

"It is lovelier now than it has ever been before," he said gently. "You have enhanced it quite wonderfully, Miss Grier—because you are '*molta simpatica*.'"

IX

A NEIGHBOURLY CALL

AFTER that walk and its wonder-working conversation, Julietta was almost too tumultuously happy to think. But she was aware—her heart, if not her brain, was telling her things—that life could never again be to her as it had been : monotonous, self-centered, fretful. Whether it was or was not to be that she should see much of this young man, enjoy much of his transfiguring companionship, she could never again be without this ideal that he had given her : "*Molta simpatica*" ! She had long bemoaned the absorption by her household tasks which kept her, as she thought, from being clever and so of consequence to her world. But here was a new vista

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opened up to her : a beautiful new life in which one came into happiness and helpfulness not by what one could *do*, but by what one could *feel*.

Julietta was singing—softly, to herself—when she opened the front door and entered the dusky house. The air indoors was heavy with stove heat ; the house was an old-fashioned one, and stoves instead of steam-pipes had long been a deep grievance of the old Julietta who had such a talent for grievances. Tingling as she was with her brisk walk, and with her vigorous new interests, she felt stifled with the staleness of that hot, heavy air. Did it strike her menfolk that way when they came into it? she wondered. And how had it seemed to them to come home, evening after evening, not only out of the crisp air into this closeness, but out of their world of fresh

A Neighbourly Call

interests into this world of hers where the interests were all stale?

She opened several windows and one door, and let in a rush of new air to rout the old. Then, when the atmosphere seemed more breathable, she lighted the reading lamp, took the wrappers from two magazines that had come in the afternoon mail, and looked about wistfully for some other little thing that she might do to give the room a look of home. She was sorry she had not brought home a few of the most gorgeous red maple leaves to put on her supper-table. To-morrow she would do this! For to-morrow—— Well! John Shepard had told her that it was a delight to him to have some one to walk with who walked as well as she did, and an even greater delight to have some one to talk with who was interested in such

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real things. He worked hard, usually, until mid-afternoon, he said; and then he obliged himself to go out for exercise. Hitherto he had had to *make* himself go out. But if he could hope that sometimes he might stop in and see if she were inclined for a walk——

Julietta's assurance that he "might indeed" was so eager that it would almost certainly have dampened the ardour of a man who was hoping for the pleasurable lure of coquetry. But John Sheppard had been surfeited with coquetry; and when he wanted more of it, he knew where he could go and unfailingly find it.

At supper that night Julietta had so pretty a flush, so radiant a look—what with the long walk, and with other things—that each of her three menfolk was conscious of a surprised realization that

A Neighbourly Call

Julietta was pretty. She had another surprise in store for them, too.

"Steve," she said, "do you suppose it would do any good to put a notice for a girl in your store? I've made up my mind to get one, if I can; even if she isn't very good, she can sweep a little, and dust a little, and peel potatoes, and wash dishes. And that'll give me a tiny bit more time for some things I want to do."

"You know," her father reminded, "that you've tried that kind before; and it always ended in your doing everything yourself, and being exasperated all the while, to boot."

"I remember," Julietta replied. "I don't want another incompetent if I can get any other kind. If we can get efficiency for a good price, I'd rather go without something less essential, and

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have it. But if we can't ——! Well, I'll take what I can get, and try to overlook what it won't help me to see."

"I'll put the notice up to-night," Steve declared. "And I'll say: 'Best Wages.'"

"We'll all help," Frank interposed. "Maybe there's something father or I could do towards hunting down a good one."

"Say 'No washing,' Steve, please," Julietta directed. "I couldn't think of taking the washing away from Mrs. Mears; she needs the work."

Julietta's menfolk stared—a little; but, being wise in their day and generation, they made no remark.

She wondered if he would come the very next afternoon. Would he think of her again so soon? Or, if he did, would he persuade himself that she would be

A Neighbourly Call

surprised—perhaps even amused—to find him there so quickly, and be ashamed to come?

Julietta could not make up her mind whether to stay in and hope that he might call, or to go out and hope that she might meet him. She blushed when she realized how eager to see him again she was. Her glance roved about the sitting-room restlessly. What had she been wont to do with herself in the afternoons before yesterday? She could hardly remember.

In the midst of her quandary the door-bell rang. Julietta's heart jumped, and the pretty colour came flooding back into her cheeks. She looked into the hall-rack mirror, to make sure she had no straying locks.

Mr. Sheppard looked more than a little self-conscious.

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"I didn't mean to bother you again so soon, Miss Grier—really I didn't!" he apologized. "But I don't mean to impose on your good nature by asking you to walk with me to-day. This is just a neighbourly call—— I ought to have gone to the back door, by rights. You see, I've never known anybody here that I could ask information of. And to-day when my Jap told me that we must send some household linens out to be washed, I wondered if I mightn't trouble you to tell me where to send them. I'm afraid to entrust Mrs. Hanson's pretty things to a laundry."

"Why, of course!" she cried. "I've a splendid laundress. Come in—won't you?—and let me tell you about her."

He hesitated. "I'm afraid you're busy," he began; but even Julietta could see that he wanted to be urged.

A Neighbourly Call

"Not a bit!" she declared. "And if you'd like me to take you over to see Mrs. Mears, I'd be only too glad to do it."

"It wouldn't be an imposition?"

"Not at all! I'm interested in Mrs. Mears, and I've been wishing for a good excuse to go and see her. I could hardly go without an excuse, because she's a very busy woman and doesn't have much time for mere friendly calls."

"Perhaps she won't have time, either, for my table-cloths?" he hazarded. "My Jap told me he heard it was very difficult to get good laundry work done here. He says some one in the village told him that every week a hamperful of Mrs. Grant Higgins' fine things goes to Paris for laundering."

"Not really?"

"Well, I've never seen the hamper, of

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course. But it isn't the first time I've heard of that thing being done."

Julietta's eyes flashed. "The idea!" she cried.

He loved the spirit of her, and his look said so plainly.

X

FINDING HIS HEROINE

ON the way to Mrs. Mears' cottage, which was quite at the outskirts of the village, they passed the great stone gateway of the Grant Higgins place. The house, set way back in the splendidly shaded grounds, was hardly from any view-point visible to the curious common eye. Beside the gate was a lodge house, which had occasioned no small amount of talk when it was built. It was the only one for miles about. Other millionaires had great mansions, but there was not one of them whose front door-bell any one in all the world might not ring, if he had the temerity. In vain was it explained on the Higgins' behalf that the lodge bell was their front

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door-bell, and any one might pull it. The community felt its intelligence, as well as its democracy, affronted by such an explanation.

"So you think," John Sheppard resumed, nodding towards the great gateway, "that Mrs. Higgins should be able to get her clothes washed in this country?"

"I don't care a fig about where she gets her foolish clothes washed!" Julietta cried. "But I do think the Higginses ought to obey the law about gleaning the corners of their fields!"

He looked puzzled. "I don't believe I understand," he murmured.

"Did you read in the papers, two days ago, that Grant Higgins has given a hundred thousand dollars for an Erring Women's Refuge?"

"Yes; I believe I did."

Finding His Heroine

"Didn't it make you—well, didn't it make you *wonder*, at least?"

"It did! My mind has been running on themes like that—in connection with my play."

"Is your play going to be about such things?"

"It's *trying* to be! But —— I don't know what the matter is! I've got the feeling strong; got the intense will to do it. But I write and write, and when I come to read what I've written, it's the same old feeble, futile protest that nobody ever really heeds. Sometimes, if a few writers get bitter and incendiary enough, they can stir up a revolution against greed. But what happens? Untold suffering of the innocent; a little suffering of the guilty; reaction; and the old state of affairs again. Like France exchanging mild Louis for bloodthirsty

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Robespierre and then for tyrannical Napoleon. I'd like to be one of those that helped on a happier day—that's the only *real* thing there is to live for!—but stirring up ire against Mrs. Higgins' laundry hampers isn't any way to bring the magic feeling that we talked about; do you think so?"

Julietta shook her head thoughtfully. "I suppose it is not," she said. "And I'm sure *I* don't feel ire against any one for being rich—only (since the day before yesterday!) for gleaning the corners after having harvested the field."

Sheppard looked up sharply. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean," she answered with spirit, "that if people would only remember the old law about gleaning, it would help to solve so many things. I don't *blame* anybody for not remembering it. *I*

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didn't—until the picture made me look it up. I just wish it might be possible to put other people in mind of it."

"I don't believe I know—except in a very vague way," he faltered.

"Well, as I say, I didn't, either," she replied, "until I had looked it up in the Bible. It seems that in other nations of olden days the widow and the fatherless had to become dependents on their nearest male kin. But in Israel a woman who wanted to be beholden to nobody could work for her bread and get it. Those that reaped the harvests were ordered not to pick their fields too clean; so that when the gleaners came along there might be enough left to reward their back-breaking toil. The laws are plain; I read 'em all. There's not a word about building granaries and locking the doors, and if the widow and the

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fatherless can answer questions satisfactorily, the wealthy farmer is to hand them out a bit of *dole*. Not a word ! He's to let them work in his field, and to see to it that they get enough to glean. And he's to do it remembering that he was once a bondman in the land of Egypt ! I've heard all that preached about a half a hundred times or so ; but the sermons were all about what a good daughter-in-law Ruth was, and how she became the great-grandmother of David ; and that never seemed to have much in it for me. All this other I figured out for myself, and I suppose that the reason it all seemed so wonderful was because I tried it on myself, first thing."

Mr. Sheppard seemed so deep in thought that Julietta could not be sure if he were listening to her or had gone on some "long, long trail" of his own. But

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she was feeling the exhilaration of putting her discovery into words. It isn't easy to tell your spiritual evolutions to the people who've lived beside you for years, and who think that they know you "like a book." A new acquaintance, if it be the right kind and auspiciously begun, is a wonderful "developer"; under its stimulus, all kinds of impressions flash up in recognizable forms and likenesses. It is in revealing ourselves to new acquaintances that we find out, oftener than in any other one way, new truths about ourselves. Everybody ought to form a new acquaintance of an intimate, confidence-for-confidence sort, at least twice a year; some souls, that grow fast, need one oftener. Julietta had been allowing herself far too little of this experience; she had been feeling like a blank plate, and had given herself over to bitterness

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on that account, when all she needed was exposure to the light, and a touch of stimulating "developer." And the darker a blank plate has been kept, of course, the better the picture when the flash of light—the hundredth of a second flash of real light—comes. Which was the secret, no doubt, of the clear image made on Julietta's mind by the idea of the gleaners. And so, whether Sheppard heard her or not, she was far from having made her speech in vain. For she had convinced herself; and that is the first step towards service.

But Sheppard did hear. He was keen; he knew what Julietta was giving him: the first account she had tried to render of her awakening. And he was as reverent towards it as he had been towards the story of Millet's sharp recall from his least-worthy self. He was reverent

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towards both, because he had so vivid a recollection of the day, not long ago, when he had seemed without other aim than the continued writing of comic operas; and of the very next day, when he knew, as well as he knew now, that he was through with his jester's job forever. He remembered, too, how he had tried to tell his friends; and how they had laughed at him and told him he was "bilious." He remembered the first time he had been able to open his heart; it was to a comparative stranger, too!

He was doing more, though, than listening and remembering. He was looking ahead. Some things Julietta was saying fitted strangely well into the blank places of that puzzle picture he called his drama. When she said: "I guess the reason it seemed so wonderful

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was because I tried it on myself, first thing," he stopped stock-still in the road.

"That's it!" he cried, exultantly. "Of course! That's it!"

She looked a little mystified; the exuberance of his affirmation almost startled her.

"I began on Mrs. Mears," she went on, "our washwoman, whom we're going to see."

And she told him the simple story of her talk with Mrs. Mears.

When she had finished, Sheppard turned to her with delight irradiating his face.

"Miss Grier," he said, "you've no idea what you have done for me! I've been trying to write my drama, and to put into it some of the things I feel about such gross injustices as are wrought by men like Grant Higgins. But the thing

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wouldn't work out. It's easy to do the ordinary indictment ; but it has been done so often and to so little purpose. You know how different I wanted to make mine. But I couldn't. It kept getting away from me and running into stereotyped situations that I knew would never make people think ; they'd look, and listen, and go home saying: 'Those rich men ought to be ashamed of themselves!' And when they were home, they'd forget. I wanted to write a play that would make each and every one who saw it demand of himself: 'What can *I* do about it?' But that play wouldn't come. You've brought it to me! You've made me see how I was all wrong. I was trying to write my play about a man like Grant Higgins. And it's *you* I should have been writing about !"

"Me?" echoed Julietta, in amazement.

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“How could anybody write a play about me?”

“You wait and see!” he cried. “But you must help me, too. And if we can write something that will make every one go home and try the doctrine on Mrs. Mears, the Grant Higginses will soon be taken care of. . . . And yet you say that you’re not clever!”

XI

A GLEANER

MRS. MEARS was ironing, and Julietta persuaded her to let them come into the kitchen to talk to her.

"I know what it means to be interrupted—even for a few minutes—when your irons are just right and you have a big piece of evenly-dampened linen drying on your board," Julietta said. So they were admitted to the kitchen, where Mrs. Mears had to clear off two chairs before she could ask them to sit down.

"I don't always leave things get piled up this way," she apologized. "But this bein' such a fine dryin' day, I washed later'n usual—in case it'd maybe rain

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to-morrow. An' then, without waitin' to clean up none, I had to begin ironin', because there's some o' these things Mrs. Ellendorf wants to-night—'count o' Mr. Ellendorf goin' away."

"So Mrs. Ellendorf is one of your customers?" Julietta asked. She was hopeful of finding out the names of all Mrs. Mears' patrons.

"Yes'm ; I've washed fer her fer quite some time. My customers is mostly pretty steady, I must say. What I'd do if they wasn't, I don't know. A lady that come here yesterday was real provoked with me because I couldn't take her washin' until she gets a new girl. I tried t' tell her how I couldn't do no more'n what I'm doing, an' couldn't put off none o' my steady people fer an extry. She was as cross as sticks ! Said she didn't know what workin' people was comin' to

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when a lady couldn't get her clothes washed. 'There's the laundry!' I says. 'They charge too outrageous,' she says; 'an' besides, they ruin things.' I guess that talk with you must 've made me kind o' sassy, Miss Grier; fer I spoke right up to her, an' says: 'But I'll bet if I did yer clothes, an' did 'em careful an' tried t' charge you what the laundry does, you'd have threatened t' put the law on me fer a thief an' a robber.' "

Julietta laughed delightedly. Mrs. Mears was leading up quite easily to what was on Julietta's mind.

"I've been thinking, Mrs. Mears," she said, "that if you were willing I'd go to each of your patrons and tell them how I had come to feel about paying you; and see if I can get any of the others to see it the same way. I know how you feel: you wouldn't want to take a chance of

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losing a steady customer. But if I asked ——!"

Mrs. Mears' lips trembled for a moment before she could command herself to speak.

"If you think they wouldn't take it amiss," she ventured. "It'd mean an awful lot t' me if I was t' get just that much more. It'd be as much as Elsie gets, barrin' car fare, for her week's work; an' some besides. I could keep her at home t' help me a bit with the housework; an' maybe I could have her learn something that'd give her a chance at a better job than three dollars a week."

"Of course you could!" cried Julietta, in an inclusive affirmation. "And I'm going this very day to see about it."

She was so eager to put the proposition before those other women that she could hardly wait for Mr. Sheppard to

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conclude his simple arrangement with Mrs. Mears.

Once they were outside again—out of the steaming hot kitchen where Mrs. Mears spent nearly all her days—and drawing long breaths of the balmy October air, John Sheppard turned to Julietta and cried :

“ The wonder of it ! ”

“ The wonder of what ? ” Julietta echoed.

“ Of everything ! Of the tremendously moving human story that you make me see ! Of its having waited—so ‘ inevitable ’ a story !—for me to do. And most of all, of your bringing it to me in just this way. I call it quite the most splendid thing that ever happened to any young man in or out of a fairy tale ! ”

The pink that was so pretty came flooding into Julietta’s cheeks.

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“I—why, it’s nothing—what I did ; the wonderful part is all in what you made of it,” she murmured. “But I’m glad—I’m *very* glad, if I helped, even a little. That’s wonderful to *me* ! I never expected to be worth even that much.”

“Worth !” he cried. “Why, you’re worth all the other young women I ever heard of ! You’re a *real* heroine ! If there could be just one like you in every community—one who, when an ideal came to her, grappled with it and wouldn’t let it go till she had got the best out of it for her own life and those around her—it wouldn’t take long to make the world a sweeter place to live in.”

Julietta’s eyes filled with grateful, happy tears. A week ago she had not known there was so much glory in God’s world.

XII

JULIETTA'S PLAY

JOHN SHEPPARD wished very, very much that he might have heard Julietta make her plea to the several patrons of Mrs. Mears. But he realized how impossible that was. It was sufficiently difficult for Julietta to make these calls and tell her story; it would have been quite impossible for her to take a strange young man along.

So she went alone from house to house of the five other patrons; and John Sheppard, at a discreet distance down the street, waited, in an agony of impatience, her reappearance. It made him heart-sick when he thought how liable her lovely ardour was to meet with a chill

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rebuff ; and yet he dared not stay by her to protect her.

She was biting her lip to keep from crying when she came away from Mrs. Ellendorf's.

"She says," Julietta answered to John Sheppard's look of sympathetic questioning, "that the cost of living is high enough now, without her trying to make things any worse by paying more for washing. I—I guess she thinks I'm kind of crazy."

"Of course she does," John Sheppard cried. "And yet, I see, she keeps an electric runabout. But if anything should happen to little Elsie Mears—if she should get discouraged, or too-much tempted, and should leave Grant Higgins' factory en route for his Erring Women's Refuge—how hard on Higgins Mrs. Ellendorf would be! Don't you see how much

Julietta's Play

more far-reaching this makes your play? For there are only a comparatively few Higginses. But there are hundreds of thousands of Ellendorfs."

"Oh, let us hope not!" cried Julietta, trying to smile instead of crying. "For if there are hundreds of thousands like Mrs. Ellendorf, I'm afraid ——"

She stopped abruptly.

"Afraid the play will never accomplish anything?" he finished for her.

Julietta flushed. "I—— No!" she declared. "Of all people in the world I ought to be the last to think that. For a week ago I'm sure any one would have seemed justified in saying of *me* that if a big, noble idea were to be presented to me, it would almost certainly get the—the door slammed in its face. I was dead enough to make anybody hopeless about my resurrection."

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"Why, you were nothing of the sort!" he contended.

"You don't know what I was," she reminded him. "But I know! And I know that if I could be resurrected, anybody can be. And I believe that if anybody can move the Ellendorfs—'Thou art the man!' This idea of yours ——"

"Of *mine*?" he cried. "Why, my dear—Miss Grier! It's no idea of mine, it's yours—all yours! every bit of it. All I've done is to appreciate it—and appropriate it!"

She smiled delightedly at him.

"Have it your own way then," she said. "But if it is to get to other people, you must get it to them. Because I am quite evidently destined for no success at that."

"You give up easily—don't you?" he charged, reproachfully.

Julietta's Play

She winced. "You're right," she admitted, humbly. "I do. But can I, for instance, try Mrs. Ellendorf again? If I go back there with that same plea, she'll probably have me arrested for a lunatic."

"Well, if she did," John Sheppard reminded, "it wouldn't be the *first* time that some one trying to give the world a better ideal had been arrested and put in jail—would it?"

"I suppose not."

"No ; nor it wouldn't be the last time. But—here I go again on my hobby! —wouldn't it be wonderful if, instead of trying to break into people's lives with our new ideas, we could do something that would make people come out and hunt them?"

Julietta smiled. The idea of Mrs. Ellendorf out in an eager hunt for new

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ideals was grimly amusing to her, fresh from that chilling interview.

“ You don’t believe it could be done ? ”

“ I don’t believe that *I* could do it. ”

“ Couldn’t we do it together ? ”

“ How ? ”

“ I’m not sure that I know how ; but maybe if we think—hard—a way will suggest itself. You don’t know Mrs. Ellendorf very well ? ”

“ Hardly at all. I have met her a few times, very formally ; but she has never been inside my house, and this is the first time I ever called on her. ”

“ I know the type ! No discoverable capacity for any ardour except an ardour for more possessions. Yet there must be a spot in her somewhere—a little, lonely, hungry spot—that mere possessions cannot fill. If one could only find out what it is ! Well, maybe we can. At any rate,

Fulietta's Play

I think we'll try. Nearly everybody abandons Mrs. Ellendorf and her kind after one hasty, discouraging survey. We're going to make at least one more attempt."

"Are we?"

"Yes; and by 'we' I don't mean 'you,' all alone. I'm going to help, next time. But these first calls I'm afraid you'll have to see through all unaided."

"Except by your sympathy ——"

"Except by my sympathy!"

"Then, forward, march!" she said.
"I'm going to attack the citadel of Mrs. Updyke."

"I don't believe there was ever another so worthless a crusader!" he declared, woefully, when she rejoined him.
"I can't tell you what a cowardly Pretender I feel."

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"I suppose," she rejoined, "that prudence has sometimes made other men keep quiet when they'd rather be in the attacking party."

"Doubtless. But a husky gent who lets a lovely lady go ahead and meet the enemy alone——! Well, what is the news of this affray? Report the killed and wounded."

"The casualties are all on our side," she told him. "It was a particular friend of Mrs. Updyke's whose washing Mrs. Mears refused to do. Mrs. Updyke had never heard of such impertinence. Is it worth while going on, do you think?"

"Why, of course it is! You wait and see."

So Julietta went on.

Mrs. Pendleton was an impressionable little body. She said she'd love to do it—but couldn't; her girls were just at

Julietta's Play

an age where they wore so many wash clothes—dresses and petticoats and guimps and shirt-waists—that it would ruin her to pay anything like laundry prices. She was sorry! But it was such a struggle to keep her girls looking nice. So many of the girls they went with had laundresses by the week in their homes. If there was anything else she could do for Mrs. Mears, though! Did Julietta think that Mrs. Mears would like the white piqué suit Mrs. Pendleton's youngest daughter had outgrown? It was a perfectly good suit, only too small. . . .

"I tried to explain that Mrs. Mears had no time to do up white piqué for her family; but Mrs. Pendleton was determined. So here's the suit!"

Julietta held out a bundle.

"And Mrs. Pendleton is quite happy—believing that she has risen to the occa-

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sion. Now she can dismiss the matter from her mind."

"I'm so glad I didn't write my play about the Higginses," he said.

XIII

THE PLOT BEGINS

JULIETTA'S other calls were also unavailing. No one thought favourably of paying Mrs. Mears more than the least she would take.

"Now," declared John Sheppard, when she came away from Mrs. Borland's, "you're about to be reinforced: a young man with *a idee* is about to offer you his services."

There was encouragement in his tone, his manner.

"Oh! have you *got* it?" Julietta cried, eagerly.

"I have a little one—to begin on," he answered. "The big one that finally works will be yours, doubtless."

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She shook her head. "But tell me yours," she urged.

"Mine's hardly worth calling an idea," he said; "it's a mere suggestion. But it may do to start on. What you want is another chance at those five women—oh, yes you do! You're not beaten! But you can't just exactly go back and repeat your plea which has failed to move them. You want to get them in different conditions. *What* conditions?"

"That's more than I can ever guess," replied Julietta.

"I don't blame you. But—well! before I tell you what I had thought of, let me ask you something. Would you do me the honour of going to the theatre with me?"

"Why, I'd *love* to!" Julietta cried.

"Could you go this evening?"

"Yes, thank you; I could."

The Plot Begins

"This isn't dodging the question of our crusade; it's part of it," he assured her. "I'll unfold my little plan to you on our way home—after we've seen a friend of mine who'll surely be surprised to see me."

They took the theatre train into the city. Mr. Sheppard had not said anything about what they were going to see, and Julietta was so pleasurably excited over the expedition and its air of mystery that any play would have delighted her. But her happiness knew no bounds when she found herself in the lobby of that theatre where her favourite actress (who was also the favourite of a very large and loyal public) was playing. Julietta waited in the lobby while Mr. Sheppard went to see about tickets.

He was gone some time because, as he

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explained on his return, the house was sold out, and there had to be some "figuring done" as to where he and Julietta might sit. Even the house manager's box was sold.

At length, however, a place was found for them, and they saw the play. It was not until after the last curtain had gone down that Julietta learned she was to meet the star. She was quite panic-stricken—so evidently nervous that Mr. Sheppard was a little fearful, remembering what he had to propose.

The star was so delighted to see him that she did not seem to notice Julietta's shyness. She was long used to a stiff self-consciousness in people who came back onto the stage to see her. Many people she met in drawing-rooms were stiff and self-conscious enough ; but on the stage, after a performance, when

The Plot Begin

everything about them is so distractingly unusual and interesting, the strangers from the other side of the footlights are even less likely to suggest anything of their probable character when they are at their ease.

But Mr. Sheppard (whom the star called Jack) was too wise in the ways of the theatre to linger on a stage after a performance when everybody from the star to the stage doorkeeper is in a hurry to get away.

"I'll answer all your questions later," he promised the star. "I'm living out on the North Shore—writing. I want you to come out. I can't ask you to my bachelor abode. But Miss Grier, who is not only my neighbour but my quite wonderful collaborator, will invite you to her house, I'm sure. And we can all go for a fine walk—I remember how you love that!"

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Julietta gasped ; but no one noticed it. What *could* Mr. Sheppard be thinking of! Their old-fashioned house ! And no girl !

As in a dream, Julietta heard him asking the star if she could come to-morrow ; heard her say she could (she was a young woman of few engagements) ; heard him tell her about the 11:15 train.

Eleven-fifteen ! That meant luncheon. Julietta wondered if she were to have the party.

The star thanked her ; and she murmured something in reply—she never knew what.

“Now we must make a dash for our train !” John Sheppard declared. “I’ll meet you at the station to-morrow.”

He hailed a taxi, and they whirled to the depot

The Plot Begins

"That'll be great fun!" he declared—meaning the party to-morrow.

"Will it?" murmured Julietta, weakly.

He took no notice of her anxiousness—partly because it never occurred to him that it might be an "undertaking" for Julietta to have the star to luncheon; and partly because he was so eager to impart his suggestion.

"Of course it will!" he cried. "You'll love her—everybody does. And I know she will love you. Wait till you see her face when *she* hears about *The Gleaners*."

"But how can I entertain her?" Julietta faltered.

"You won't have to. She can entertain herself and us too. There's hardly anything under the shining sun—any *real* thing!—that she isn't interested in."

"I know—but I haven't any girl."

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"Any what?"

"Any servant—any one to do things for her—like she's used to."

"You mean about luncheon?"

"Yes."

"Well, we could take her to the North Shore hotel, if you'd rather. But if it's *her* 'ruthers' you're thinking of, I can tell you that she'd ten thousand times rather go to your house and help get her own luncheon. And I could pretty nearly tell you what it would be a *real* treat to her to have."

"What?"

"Well, either pancakes or waffles or little baking-powder biscuits—hot—with honey on 'em. Have you ever tried to eat any of those in a hotel—even the best hotel in the world?"

"No."

"Well, you're fortunate. Then, I

The Plot Begins

should think that either corned-beef hash or Irish stew with dumplings would be about all else you'd need to make the feast put Lucullus' in the shade, for her."

"Not really?"

"Will you try it and see?"

"I will."

XIV

LEADING A HORSE TO WATER

JULIETTA'S men-folk declared that they would be absentees from luncheon, thereby saving her some work and themselves the effort of coming home and being polite to a strange and celebrated lady.

"You'll have a better time, and so will we," they said, good-naturedly. They were whole-heartedly delighted at Julietta's new interests.

So she made her preparations for three only. And, somehow, it was not of the star's coming to her house to eat of her cooking that she found herself thinking with the greatest sense of wonder and expectancy, but of John Sheppard's com-

Leading a Horse to Water

ing. It was his pleasure that she had in mind as she prepared her corned-beef hash and mixed her flaky biscuit. Julietta could cook ! It was a severe temptation to her to show what she could do. But she had promised that she wouldn't. And in any case, she was beginning to realize that the unwearied spirit, and not the elaborateness of the menu, is the essence of hospitality.

So she kept faithfully to her hash and her biscuits and honey, and her fragrant coffee and yellow cream ; adding to his suggestions only by a simple green salad (her French dressing was her pride) and some hot gingerbread and warm apple-sauce.

There could be no doubt of the star's appreciation of that luncheon ! Nor of John Sheppard's—either on his own account or on hers.

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And after they had eaten *and* eaten, they helped Julietta wash and wipe the dishes and put them away. By this time, Julietta had completely lost her self-consciousness with the star. For the star was one of those whom John Sheppard had described as *molta simpatica*; one who by a lovely magic set people at rights with their best selves.

"Ah, *The Gleaners!*" she exclaimed, when they had gone back to the sitting-room. "Did I tell you, Jack, that I was at Barbizon this summer?"

"No!"

"I drove there from Fontainebleau—straight through the heart of the forest. My! what a drive. And I stayed at that famous little hotel near the forest's edge, where the hamlet of Barbizon begins. Have you never been there?"

"Never—yet."

Leading a Horse to Water

"Go, then—at your first opportunity."

"I mean to," he declared.

"I don't know when anything has made a profounder impression on me," she went on. "The majesty of the forest and of the great plain, and the other majesty—of simplicity and earnestness and fidelity to visions—of the few men who made that rude hamlet famous through all the world. I had something of the same feeling at Domrémy—when I thought of little Jeanne going forth from there with a faith that was to shake kingdoms—and to defy faggot-flames! God be praised!" she cried, her eyes brimming, "for the dreamers who have stood fast. And I don't doubt that, to Millet, the wolf at the door was full as terrifying as the crackling of the faggots to little Jeanne."

"I don't think it was either of those

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that hurt the most," Julietta ventured.

"I think it was ——" she hesitated.

"Mrs. Ellendorf," John Sheppard said for her.

The star looked mystified.

"Come out in the sunshine, under the maple trees," he went on, "and we'll tell you."

Julietta had never known anything so wonderful as the star's interest in their story. It was more than satisfying; it was inspiring.

"And now for the 'plot'!" she cried, when she had heard it "up to date."

"The plot is a little chaotic as yet," he admitted. "But the idea at the back of it is something like this: What was it we used to do in school, in arithmetic (what I mostly did in arithmetic was to wonder and despair!) when we tried to

Leading a Horse to Water

find the least common denominator, or greatest common divisor, or something that went into other things — Oh, my goodness! I'm making an awful muddle. But here were Mrs. Ellendorf and Mrs. Updyke, and Mrs. Pendleton and Mrs. Borland and Mrs. Corwin; five women with, so far as we could discover, no interest in common except their wash-woman, and mighty little interest in her. We want to get at those women. We want to try out, through them, the power of an idea. They are not interested in Mrs. Mears; they are not interested in us; they are not interested in one another; but they are interested in *you*!"

She looked dismayed. "Am I to preach the gospel to them?"

"Not in the way you think—from house to house, as Miss Grier did."

"Nor yet from the roadside, I hope?"

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"Dear me, no! A roadside preacher would have no caste with them."

"How, then—in your new play?"

"That remains to be dreamed about. But if you preach it in a play, we shall never know what the Ellendorfs and Updykes *do* about it after they get home. This is our chance of a lifetime to set them wrestling with an idea and see the finish."

"I'd love the experience. But what part am I to play?"

"You're to be the bait; Mrs. Mears is to be the hook; and we—Miss Grier and I—are to be the—well, I suppose the line and sinker. However, it's the bait that's the important part of fishing—getting the kind of bait that the fish you want will bite for. You're a magic bait—almost any fish that swims will bite for you."

"That's pretty—if untruthful," she re-

Leading a Horse to Water

torted, smiling. "How do I attach myself to the hook?"

"In the simplest way. We're going there now."

"What am I to do?"

"Become a patron—to as small an extent as you choose."

"And then?"

"The *Shore Suburban News* to-morrow will announce that you spent to-day with your friend, Miss Grier."

"And after that?"

"Well, you're here for four weeks at least—are you not?"

She nodded assent.

"We must not be too precipitate. To-morrow you have a *matinée*. Then comes Sunday. And then——! Well, then I'm not sure. The idea is to get it, surreptitiously, to the knowledge of these ladies that you are interested in Mrs.

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Mears, and particularly in Elsie. Now, how best to do that ——”

“I’m to lead them to the water—to change our simile—but how *am* I to make them drink?”

“They’ll drink when they see you drinking.”

“But won’t they quit when I have to?”

“You won’t quit—you’ll only move on your way. I don’t know what they’ll do. All we can do is to try.”

XV

AND MAKING HIM DRINK

THEY tried. Julietta wrote cards of invitation for Thursday afternoon, to meet the star. She sent them quite generally among her acquaintances, and the star heroically endured the "tea"—for the good of the cause.

If each of the five was surprised to find herself included she was agreeably so. And if each of them was surprised at the star's cordiality towards her, that also was most agreeable.

Then the star did something that was as hard for her, almost, as the crackling flames of another kind of martyrdom, she said: she "spoke a piece." Mr. Shepard had written the piece; although

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that fact was not mentioned. It was about the stern fight of a sixteen year old girl to keep her eyes averted not from gewgaws, merely, but from the most ordinary comforts and little girlish pleasures ; of her loosening grasp on safety ; her slipping into the abyss.

All the women cried copiously. The star was crying, too.

“The great thing,” she said, when they came crowding around her with their ejaculations, “is to hold out the saving hand while there’s yet time : the hand of justice, not the hand of mercy. Justice gives a girl her fair fight ; mercy cannot atone to her for not having had it. We all want to do what we can ; but some of us look too far afield for it. Just now I’m finding one opportunity in the daughter of my laundress ——” And so on.

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The talk grew very animated. Only, at five o'clock the star had to go back to town—with a multitude of things left unsaid.

"Do, please," she entreated as she was leaving, "any of you, who are working along these lines, write to me about your experiences. I'm so interested."

And within a week she had five letters, out of a score or more, relating to Elsie Mears.

"They've all been to see her, anyway," the star told Julietta when she showed the letters.

"And offered her their outgrown piqué suits, no doubt," Julietta observed.

"Never mind, dear; they've got to work out their own salvation; nobody can do it for them, and no one of them can do it for another. And at least, when we plead for justice and not for

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mercy, we leave less opportunity for weird experiments than people perpetrate in the name of charity. A woman must be quite terribly deficient in sanity who can go to see Mrs. Mears, with a view to helping Elsie to a fair chance, and come away with no better grasp of the situation than that an outgrown white piqué suit is an equivalent of Justice."

To each and every letter the star replied :

"You ask me what you can do. You say that Mrs. Mears has never asked and probably would not receive charity. It would be a great pity if she *would* receive it ! The best we can do for such a fine, sturdy woman, it seems to me, is to see that she gets a fair wage for her work. Perhaps, considering the heavy burden she has to bear, and the tremendous fact that she is trying to rear six worthy young citizens, it would not be beyond the bounds of justice if she were to be paid more than

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we pay a laundry for less careful work. But she should certainly, it seems to me, not be paid less. Beyond this, we have no rights in her affairs, I think, except such as we have in those of any other neighbour for whom we feel an affectionate interest."

Even then "it came hard," as Julietta said. "They would have slaved themselves sick to get up a benefit for the Mearses. But the undramatic business of paying out an additional half dollar a week on the washing bill is almost beyond them."

It was here that Julietta's own heroism found its stiff test. For not to lose patience with those women required an almost superhuman steadfastness to purpose.

She declared that it was John Sheppard who kept her to her course. He declared that it was Julietta who was leading him.

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"Everybody wants to be a sower of seed—the seeds of new ideals, new ideas," he said. "But hardly anybody wants to be a gardener, hovering over the seeded soil and coaxing along the blossom and then the fruit. You make me feel ashamed of my so-much-easier undertaking."

He told her, daily, that the play was going forward quite wonderfully ; but he never discussed its details with her as she knew that he did with the star. This, Julietta thought, was because he knew how ignorant of things dramatic she was. Yet, much as she loved and admired the star, she could not help feeling jealous of her. How could John Sheppard resist falling in love with her? What could a girl like Julietta be to him who lived and moved and had his being in a world of women like the star?

And Making Him Drink

Love brings its exceeding bitterness with every drop of its honey-sweet ; and Julietta grew well acquainted with that bitterness as golden October waned, and November with its sharper chill came on.

She saw John Sheppard every day ; but sometimes for a brief while only. He was working very hard, and was often wrought to a high pitch of excitability. So long as the star stayed in town, he went in frequently to see her. It seemed to Julietta that they had both—dramatist and star—drifted far, in the rapid current of their lives—from interest in gleaners and in her efforts. It was hard to say why she felt so ; but she did. It was not because either of them neglected or slighted her ; they did anything but that. But because they seemed to have a tremendous common interest that they made no sign of wishing to share with her.

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At length the star's engagement in the city was over, and she moved on. Julietta was sure that Mr. Sheppard missed the star terribly. In fact, he said that he did. And yet he seemed to seek Julietta; never to be satisfied if he did not see her every day. They had as many long walks as his work and the weather would permit. They went into town to the theatre quite frequently. And he paid Julietta almost constant tribute of flowers and sweets and books. Everything would have been idyllic had there not lurked always in Julietta's consciousness that feeling of a something closest of all things to his heart, which she was never asked to share.

XVI

THE JOY OF THE HARVBST

THEN came a day when he went to her looking as she had never in all her life seen any one—least of all a man—look. He seemed almost like a man in a fever delirium. Dull red flamed in his cheeks; his eyes glittered with a strange brightness. He was intensely excited, strung almost to snapping tension. An hour ago he had rewritten, for what would be the last time until rehearsals began, perhaps, the closing scene of his play. The typist would be done with it to-morrow.

“And then?” asked Julietta, her heart beating heavy with dread of separation.

“Then I’ll take it to New York. At first I thought of sending it, and trying

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to wait, here, until I heard. But I see now how impossible that is. So I'll go to-morrow afternoon."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes—I'm crazy! I couldn't stay behind it—not an hour, I don't believe. You don't know—yet—how fully my heart is in that play. But when you see it, you will know. It is the heart of me, and the *soul* of me. I can't send it to make its way alone."

She could not command herself to ask anything further just then. What did anything further matter? He was going; and in no human likelihood would he ever come back. The glory-days were done. And he so eager to go! Fool that she had been, to think that she was anything but a makeshift of companionship during this self-imposed exile of his!

She struggled as it seemed to her she

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had never struggled before to keep back her tears ; but they would not wait. She turned her head away. He did not seem to notice. All his thought was running ahead ; he had none, it seemed, for retrospect, for remembrance.

They walked on in silence for some time. It was he who spoke first.

"You've never seen such mad impatience—have you? You don't understand it!"

"I—don't believe I do," she faltered.

"But you *will*—some day!"

"Will I?"

"Well, I *hope* you will. I hope that when you see the play, you'll realize why I'm so excited ; why I can hardly hope to sleep or eat until I've seen how it appeals to some one else."

Yet how little eagerness he had to know how it would appeal to her!

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He had talked to her, infrequently—and in her presence, to the star—about the ways and means of play-producing. So she had some vague ideas of the time that must elapse before even the most favoured playwright could hope to know the public's judgment on his labours.

"I suppose," she hazarded, "you haven't the least idea when it will come—here."

He laughed heartily. "I wish I had the least idea when it would get anywhere," he said. "But of course, I *hope* that if it opens in New York—after a few 'road' performances, you know—it will stay there for a long, long, long, long while; not *too* long—because 'the road,' as we call all the country that is not New York, makes us bigger money, if we have a real success; but long enough so

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that there can be no doubt that New York likes us."

"I thought," ventured Julietta, "that what you cared most about, with this play, was whether it would do good."

"That's what I *do* care most about. But one of the few ways I can tell how much good it may be doing is by the statements I get of how many people have paid their money to see it—which same blessedly few theatre-goers would do if they had any suspicion of my real object. If they pay and keep paying, it will be because they have a good time at our play, and have not been bored by any too-obvious good counsel. I told you that a dramatist was not only a mere sower of seed, but that he must even do his sowing craftily. We may throw the first handful in the sign of the cross, as Millet's Normandy peasants did, with a

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prayer to God for the harvest. But *unlike* them, the harvest we may not hope to see. *That* joy is yours—yours, and some mothers' joy."

A little sob escaped Julietta, struggling successfully past the lock she had tried to set upon her heart's bitterness.

He heard it, and stopped—they were walking briskly along the Shore Road beyond the confines of their village.

"You're not discouraged?" he cried, turning so he could face her, and laying his hand appealingly on her arm.

"I try not to be," she murmured. "But—but sometimes it seems to me to be a—a pretty *scraggly* kind of harvest. I—I don't know how long my patience will last—when you're gone—and I have no one to keep me encouraged. I'm a poor, weak, wobbly 'farmer of ideals,' and I feel terribly—ashamed."

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He did not answer immediately ; when he did, his voice had a quality in it sweeter than anything Julietta had ever heard.

“Remember, dear, how Millet felt when he was painting *The Gleaners* ; and try to think what it would have been, not only to all the world, but *to us*, if he hadn't gone on.”

Julietta's tears flowed, unchecked, and her mouth trembled so that she could frame no reply. He drew her hand through his arm and they walked on, slowly—both heads bent, and his right hand still covering hers where he held it on his left arm.

“And—and when one harvest fails, the good husbandman does not give up,” he continued ; “he bides till another seed-time and sows again.”

“But I'm no sower,” she reminded.

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"I couldn't sow *this* seed, even. You and your sweet friend had to do it for me."

"Well! don't we stand ready to do it again for you, whenever you need us?"

Julietta shook her head.

"You'll soon forget me, and my little garden patch, when you're sowing your great fields for harvest," she faltered.

John Sheppard looked at her in amazement too great for words. Was it possible she thought such a thing? How *could* she not know! He had felt so sure that she understood his love. What could he *say* about it that would speak for it as his actions had! He couldn't go away and leave her in any doubt. And yet——! Must he forego that dream he had cherished so long and so jealously—that delicious dream in which he, like other men who sowed seed

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in the written word, had seen "a new heaven and a new earth," and in which a Voice had said: "Write: for these words are true and faithful!"

Gripping the hand he held so hard that it almost hurt, he bent his head lower and murmured:

"Look at me—dear."

Julietta tried to obey: she lifted her face, which was burning with blushes; but she could see him only through the blur of her tears.

"Tell me you don't believe—what you just said—about me forgetting."

Her mouth quivered; words would not come.

No one was in sight on the Shore Road. He drew her to him and kissed her eyes where the tears shone—tears for his going.

Then an automobile whirled into view.

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"Say you don't believe it," he pleaded.

The auto flew by in a cloud of dust.

"I don't believe that—you'll forget," she said. And lifted to him, full of trust, her eyes—that he had kissed.

XVII

WHAT THE PLAY WAS ABOUT

IT seemed to Julietta that she counted time, after John Sheppard left, not by figures on the dial, nor yet by heart-throbs, but by the coming of the mails.

He kept her fully posted on every detail of the play's progress.

"About all I can write you in return," she said, "is how my garden grows—my garden of ideals that you planted for me."

"That, and how you are, is about all that any one could write me that would be of intense interest to me just now," he answered.

The play had been instantly accepted.

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"I took it in to the office of the manager I preferred to any other," he wrote her on his third day in New York. "He seemed pleased to see me; asked me where I had been. 'Writing a play,' I told him. 'Good!' he said. 'Get it done?' I produced it from my pocket—like a book agent. 'What's it about?' he asked, 'nibbling' at the pages. I gave him the gist of it, briefly. He smiled quizzically. 'Think you can get away with it?' he queried. 'That's up to you to decide,' I answered. 'I'll read it to-night,' he promised. And I got out—quickly!—so that the day's work might be got through with before evening. . . . In the small hours he called me at The Players. 'I'll have your contract ready at eleven o'clock to-morrow,' he 'phoned. That was all—all that was necessary. When I saw him this morning he said: '*Where* have you been, Sheppard?' I knew what he meant, but pretended not to. 'At The Players,' I answered, stupidly. He cussed me with a look. 'I mean, where did you write your play?' I told him. 'Is this kind of thing in the atmosphere there?' he asked, tapping the

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manuscript. 'Not in the atmosphere of any place,' I replied; 'I worked there for some time without better results than if I had stayed on Broadway.' He gave me a long, searching look out of those keen eyes of his—and said nothing, for a moment. Then he handed me the contract to read. 'They do happen yet,' he muttered—as if to himself more than to me. 'What?' I asked. 'Miracles!' he grunted. 'Yes!' I said, fervently; 'they do!' . . . We discussed the cast even before I had taken the contract to my lawyer for his approval—which isn't at all necessary, but is the only thing I ever do that makes me feel businesslike."

In other matters than its acceptance the play went forward speedily; the idea being to get it on in New York before the end of January, so that if it succeeded, it might have a good long run there before the hot weather.

So rehearsals were soon in progress. These meant long hours of hard work for

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the author—much rewriting and pruning and enlarging. His daily letters to Julietta were written in such scraps of time as he could snatch from his work.

In them he began to plan definitely for her coming on. They were to play three weeks of trial performances: Baltimore, Washington, and a week of one-night stands. Then, on the very last night of January, they were to open in New York.

“My mother will be here,” he wrote, “and my married sister—and likewise, it seems, a number of my ‘cousins and my aunts.’ Mother is writing you, asking you to be her guest at the hotel. I want to meet you at the train, so we must try to find one that will bring you in here after I am back from the road, on Sunday, and before they have me snared for the Governor’s interminable dress rehearsal.”

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It all seemed like a dream to Julietta, as she read his letters and even as she went about her preparations. She had been in New York for a day or two at a time on several occasions when she went to boarding-school. But that she should be going there to stay ten days or a fortnight and to attend, as a guest of the dramatist, the first night of a play!

He telegraphed her about the play's warm reception on the road. But he sent her no newspapers. "I want you," he wrote, "to bring to the hearing a mind quite free from preconceptions. I haven't told mother, either, what my play is about."

From the moment of her arrival, Julietta was caught up into the whirl of anxiety and nervousness that precedes a metropolitan opening. They were quite on the outside, in a way—she and John

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Sheppard's mother and sister—but no one was more excited. If they had had anything to do, any responsibility, the demand on them would have helped to steady them. But they could only wait. And when they went out, and tried to divert themselves, all they could think—as they laughingly confessed to one another—was, as they scanned the people they passed: Will he come, I wonder! And will *she* like it? They saw all New York in relation only to “The Gleaners.”

At length the evening came. Mrs. Sheppard and her party were to have a box, and to wear their best, of course.

“Don't dress up *too* much—or, if you do, wear a plain, dark cloak, please,” John Sheppard whispered to Julietta. “I have—other plans for you.”

Wonderingly, she obeyed—wearing

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her ulster instead of the pretty evening wrap she had brought.

When they reached the theatre, she understood. He saw them all seated in their box, then excused himself.

"I'm going back for just a minute, to wish everybody luck," he said. "And when I return—if Miss Grier doesn't mind, I'd like her to watch the play from the balcony."

No one seemed surprised; he had evidently explained his purpose to his mother and sister. And, two minutes before the curtain was rung up, he came and got Julietta. Their seats were obscure ones wherein no one would think of looking for the author, but from which the view was excellent. And they could listen, unnoticed, to the comments all about them.

In her tense excitement, Julietta

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gripped the arm of her seat as if for support. Under cover of the friendly dusk when the curtain was up and the house was dark, John Sheppard's hand covered hers, clinging close.

Almost immediately, Julietta realized what the play was. She had supposed him joking when he said he ought to write about her.

This girl he had built his play about was not Julietta, of course—and yet she was! Nothing that she did was as Julietta had done—and yet, everything was there as they had talked about it, about the girl who put new magic into stale lives because, instead of sowing broadcast, as nearly everybody wants to do, she was willing to coax along the harvest. It was *real* comedy: people laughed until they cried; and when they cried, they could pretend (if they wanted

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to) that it was because they had laughed so hard. Julietta could pretend this, too, if she cared to pretend—and she did, for the sake of the people who could see. But John Sheppard knew!

After the third act there was an ovation, not the usual noisy first-night kind that means nothing but the good-will of friends, but a demonstration charged with real feeling, such as to make gratefully glad the hearts of those who cared so very, very much how the public took this play.

To the calls for "Author! Author!" Sheppard did not respond. When they persisted, the producer appeared, saying that Mr. Sheppard could not be found; and that, if he could be found, undoubtedly he would not be able to say what happiness their kind reception gave him.

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“ I think I know just how you feel,” the producer went on. “ You feel as I did when I read the play. Sitting alone, at home, after a hard day’s work, I went at the manuscript as—well, as some of you men go back to the office at night to have another round at the things that are never done. And before I knew it, I was laughing until I cried and crying until I laughed, and—well, as I said, I think I know how you feel. I wish you might know as well how we feel whom you have so greatly encouraged.”

Then the lights went down, and the curtain went up, and the play proceeded to its close—the close that left each auditor smiling mistily, and thoughtful each of his or her own Mrs. Mears, determined each to be a patient gardener of ideals, no matter in how small a patch of ground.

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"Will Do More Good Than All the Philippics Ever Written Against 'The Other Fellow.'"

Thus ran the verdict.

"It's your play, really. I feel ashamed to have my name attached to all this credit," John Sheppard declared to Julietta when he laid down, next afternoon, the last of the glowing tributes the day's press had paid "The Gleaners."

"You needn't let that mar your happiness," Julietta reminded him, blushing prettily. "Think how soon it will be my name, too."

END



